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Indigenous Universities and Language Reclamation: Lessons in Balancing Linguistics, L2 Teaching, and Language Frameworks from Blue Quills University

Josh Holden
University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills

1. INTRODUCTION. University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills[1] (hence UnBQ or Blue Quills) in St. Paul, Alberta, is currently the only fully independent First Nations university in Canada.[2] Located in a former residential school and owned by seven First Nations, six Cree and one primarily Dene, UnBQ is a centre for language revitalization and the exploration of Indigenous-oriented and decolonial approaches for second-language teaching and linguistics. Section 2 of this article provides an overview of the history of Blue Quills in the context of the North American tribal college and university (TCU) movement, followed by a description of the student body and language demographics, the language programs and cultural activities (land-based education and ceremony). Section 3 outlines the Cree and Dene language programs, with Section 3.2 detailing some Indigenous-centred approaches to L2 and linguistics teaching used in UnBQ courses so far. Sections 3.3 describes the author's experience teaching introductory BA and Master's-level morphosyntax classes to Dene and Cree students and classroom discussions that attempted to integrate First Nations epistemologies and perspectives, following Leonard (2017, 2018). Section 4 features translations of linguistic concepts into Denesųłiné (hence Dene) and Plains Cree languages. This section includes follow-up interviews with Cree MA students after their course, as well as interviews with the UnBQ president Sherri Chisan and the head of the Indigenous languages department, Marilyn Shirt, on the relationship between linguistics teaching, First Nations language epistemologies, and problems in the current relationship between linguistic research and community engagement, along with suggestions for how linguists can improve this collaboration, and how this meshes with current directions in the field. Finally, challenges facing Blue Quills and its possible future will be discussed in Sections 5 and 6 respectively.

[1] The author thanks UnBQ Language Program director Marilyn Shirt, UnBQ president Sherri Chisan, and UnBQ students who agreed to be interviewed or allow their comments to be included. Many thanks as well to Keren Rice, Wesley Leonard, David Beck, and Jessie Sylvestre for their valuable comments and factual corrections. Any remaining errors are my own.

[2] First Nations University of Canada (Regina, Saskatchewan) was established before Blue Quills as a First Nations-governed university, but has since become a college of the University of Regina, which awards the degrees.

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2. HISTORY OF BLUE QUILLS IN THE TCU MOVEMENT. Blue Quills's history and language programs should be understood in the context of the wider North American tribal college and university movement and the shift to Indigenous self-determination in education. This occurs in the backdrop of very low post-secondary attendance among Native American/First Nations populations in the latter 20th century. Geertz González & Colangelo (2010:4) identify the historical causes of this attendance gap as poverty because of past and current colonization, cultural bias, a legacy of forced assimilation policies in education leading to Indigenous resistance to majority education, and a dearth of Indigenous-specific rights. Historically in Canada and similar countries, education was weaponized as a means of coercion and cultural genocide in boarding and residential schools: "Education in [U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand] was used as an instrument of the White settler-state to eliminate Indigenous peoples whether by Christian or secular education", which "suppressed Indigenous ways of learning" (Geertz González & Colangelo 2010:7).

In the Canadian context, the residential school system attained its peak in the mid-20th century, and by the 1960s it had exacted a devastating toll on First Nations people, cultures and languages, on an individual and a collective level. Resistance among survivors and the parent generation had been building. According to Dene National Chief Noeline Villebrun, "In the area of education we began to speak out against the injustices of residential schools, to speak out on low-quality education, language loss, cultural erosion, social dysfunction, and sexual abuse" (Villebrun 2006). At the same time, the Canadian government chose to address the crisis of Frist Nations education by pursuing even more aggressive assimilationist policies, this time under a secular rationale of "egalitarian" citizenship. In 1969 the Pierre Trudeau-era Canadian Ministry of Indian Affairs (INAC) produced a "White Paper" calling for the abolishing of First Nations treaty rights and the total assimilation of First Nations people into the Canadian state. This was withdrawn in 1973 following an outpouring of criticism. This existential threat also sped up the drive among First Nations people to begin to publish their testimonies about their experiences in the residential schools and other discrimination they faced—see for instance, the influential book *The Unjust Society* (Cardinal 1969). Relatedly, First Nations people started to pursue self-determination in education in the form of local control and Indigenous-run and -created institutions that recognized the languages and cultures. Political organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations were formed to pursue this goal, leading to changes in the government's and white Canadians' attitudes toward First Nations education. The move to administrative Indigenous control was virtually complete by the early 1990s. The number of Indigenous post-secondary institutions multiplied, but full autonomy, range and experimentation in program design to fit Indigenous frameworks and realities did not come as quickly. According to Geertz González & Colangelo (2010:10), today there are "over 50 post-secondary colleges for First Nations peoples in Canada, but they are not allowed to offer as many programs or degrees as the tribal colleges of the United States. Moreover, [they] are asked to partner with other 'established' universities as opposed to expanding their own programs."

Blue Quills itself held a special role as a precursor and catalyst in the shift to autonomy in education (Geertz González & Colangelo 2010:16). "Blue Quills" comes from the name of a Cree chief who in 1898 petitioned Oblate missionaries to establish the school. The term *nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į* (updated spelling *nuhelot'įne thaaʔehots'į*) loosely translates to 'our ancestors' in Denesųłiné (also 'Dene'), as does *nistamey-imâkanak* Plains Cree. The history of UnBQ is outlined in Lewis et al. (2018): UnBQ's

first precursor institution was Blue Quills Residential School (1862–1898), a Catholic school funded by the federal government and administered by the Oblates and Grey Nuns. Chief Blue Quill, or Sîpihtakanep, one was of four Cree chiefs who formed Saddle Lake reserve after they made Treaty 6 in 1876. At the time, schooling was only accessible in Lac La Biche via a long, tough dogsled journey from Saddle Lake in winter. Desiring education to be more accessible to his people, he lobbied the Oblate missionaries who operated the Lac La Biche School to move the Catholic institution to Saddle Lake, where it became Blue Quill Indian School. It moved to its current building in 1931. Like other residential schools, it was characterized by emotional and physical abuse, religious coercion and underfunding. This situation continued amid parents' rising concerns until 1969 when, faced with the prospect of the underfunded and abusive school being sold to the city of St. Paul, parents instead occupied the school, leading a months-long sit-in and demanding its transfer to Indigenous control. The sit-in began with Saddle Lake parents, but they were quickly joined by participants from eleven surrounding reserves (Sherri Chisan, p.c.). Ottawa negotiated with parent-activists and finally allowed the school to move to local control by the First Nations. In the words of Sherri Chisan, president of UnBQ (from the author's interview with her):

> When the government proposed to close the school, our ancestors (parents and grandparents) said 'No, we'll run it'. Of course, neither the Church nor the government was very keen on that idea, so they resisted for several months. But finally the government agreed that they would sign over the operation and ownership of the school to the First Nations. My grandmother is Scottish, so I suspect that one of the bureaucrats felt a kindred spirit with her as opposed to his relationship to the Indigenous people on the board. At the signing ceremony apparently [he] whispered to her, 'Don't worry, they probably won't last six months anyway." My grandmother happened to be on the board—[she] had been living at Saddle Lake for all of her adult life, and was very connected to and committed to, and related to, the people, and so she relayed that to the team. Thirty years later we invited then prime minister Chrétien, who was minister of Indian Affairs at that time, to our 30th anniversary, but he declined the invitation. We thought it might be nice for him to see we that lasted more than six months. So now we're approaching 50.

Blue Quills led a wave of transfers of educational institutions to local Indigenous control eventually the creation of a number of First Nations colleges in Canada. Chisan recounted the timeline of Blue Quills's evolution and expansion: after the residential school ended, Blue Quills was born in 1970 as Blue Quills Native Education Centre, taking over primary and secondary education. Then it became Blue Quills First Nations College circa 1990, and finally UnBQ in 2016. "In the '70s a lot of our nations started building their own elementary schools, so we released that programming to them. Then by the '80s most had their own high schools, so we released that programming to them." (Sherri Chisan, interview). The focus shifted to serving an adult population. The 1970s had begun to see partnerships in adult education with provincial universities. The '90s saw the next spurt of certificate and diploma programs: the BA in leadership and management, in 1998 (first graduates 2002), BA in Social Work (2017), the certificate in Cree language in (2009) and the BA in Cree in 2015 (and in Dene in 2016). An MA in Indigenous Language (Cree-focused) also began in 2015, as interest in language education and revitalization increasingly became a focus. The sui generis iyiniw pimatisiwin kiskeyihtamowin doctoral program (ipkDoc) was launched in 2002 and the first cohort graduated in 2011).

2.1 A DISTINCT MISSION. As the name suggests, UnBQ places Cree and Dene languages and cultures at the centre of education. UnBQ's mission, while distinct from many major provincial and private universities, resembles that of many institutions in the wider North American tribal college and university movement, which led to the foundation of up to 35 TCUs in the USA by 1968, starting with Navajo Community College, today Diné College (Geertz González & Colangelo 2010). As a general tendency, TCUs tend to focus more on locally specific cultural knowledge in their curricula, and constitute a vehicle for cultural survival and self-determination for a specific Native American/First Nations group.

> Tribal colleges exemplify their direct connection to Indian tribes and tribal sovereignty through the various curricula they offer. These most often are in the form of programs and courses in American Indian studies, tribal languages, history, heritage and spiritual practices, the arts, medicinal practices, tribal government and Indian law, and other similar place-based, culturally specific curricula. Tribal experts and elders serve as advisors, teachers, and resources for such offerings. (Crazy Bull 2015:4).

This sounds quite distinct from a mission statement of a major public university, which would tend to focus on offering world-class education on universal subjects, to national and international students. While such goals are not absent from TCUs, they tend to place a strong focus on their unique missions as well as their political and economic limits (DeLong et al. 2016). In the case of UnBQ specifically, Chisan sees it "the balance of achieving a credential in diverse fields of study through an Indigenous Knowledge lens in a culturally appropriate learning environment."

Structurally, the connection with Native American/First Nations values is guaranteed by having a majority or plurality of First Nations/Native American faculty, and even more crucially an Indigenous governance structure. "Tribal experts and elders serve as advisors, teachers, and resources for [courses]" (Crazy Bull 2015:4); TCU boards are typically composed of community members, many of them Elders, who orient the direction of the university toward community needs. Along these lines, UnBQ also has a Board of Governors appointed by the seven owner nations, as well as an Elders' Senate, who all help orient the overall goals of the institution and the curriculum. In the words of Cree Elder and former Blue Quills board chairman Carl Quinn, "When I walk into [Blue Quills], I want to know it's an Indian school. I want to be able to smell the sweetgrass. I want to hear the language spoken, the drums and songs. I want to see pictures on the walls representing who we are" (Lewis et al. 2018).

Self-determination in education has been "among the key developments which have actively supported the sovereignty of tribal nations" (Crazy Bull 2015:3). The UnBQ university president Sherri Chisan describes the establishment of UnBQ as an act of First Nations sovereignty: "We are Indigenous institutions. We have relationships with the federal and provincial governments but we are clear that we do not surrender our jurisdiction in those relationships." This has implications with regard to UnBQ's and other Canadian Indigenous institutions' funding structure, as discussed in Section 5. The following sections will describe UnBQ language programs as an example of an Indigenous-led higher education model.

Indeed, there has been a strong need to develop new, Indigenous-oriented models of education: "American Indians have historically struggled to adapt to a modern educational process with its inherent social, political, and cultural baggage. Yet, American Indian cultural forms of education contain seeds for new models of educating that

can enliven education as a whole" (Cajete 2006). This carries risks, as with many "firsts" for Indigenous languages, namely that lack of financial resources and structural issues will lead skeptical observers to question the rigour and legitimacy of Indigenous institutions, and ultimately Indigenous self-governance in education. "Responsibilities and challenges include inadequate operating funds, academically unprepared students, preservation of cultural traditions within the academic environment, economic poverty on the reservation, and maintaining a positive relationship between tribal colleges and the non-Indian education environment." (DeLong et al. 2016). The TCU environment must address the specific needs of TCU students, who are typically non-traditional age and first-generation university students; "The typical student is often described as a single mother in her early 30s. It is estimated that over half of the enrollment is from single parent students" (ibid). TCUs usually have broad, open admissions policies aimed at working with almost every student who wants to take classes, even when a majority are "not academically prepared for college-level work." (ibid.) At the same time, the existence of TCUs has vastly increased the number of Native American students with a university degree, and "factors such as family support, structured support systems, supportive faculty and staff, self-efficacy, connection to culture, and connections to home [are] positive influences on Native student persistence" (Shotton et al. 2013: 15). TCU faculty are well familiar with the opposition and skepticism they face in many corners of academia. Much is riding on the success of this generation of TCUs. According to its mission, Blue Quills will "address the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental needs of the seven member First Nations through the delivery of quality education programs", and will increase "educational opportunities for students by empowering them to overcome barriers that restrict success in college and university settings."[3] The mission statement also mentions that "the maintenance and enhancement of culture contributes to positive self-esteem and, therefore, encourages participation in the learning environment", in contrast with academic environments that students feel are alien, classist, stressful or exclusionary. UnBQ is also unusual in uniting Cree and Dene cultures in a single institution, as these two First Nations groups were historically in tension (Abel 1993:47–49).

2.2 THE STUDENT BODY: FIRST NATIONS AND LANGUAGES. UnBQ has about 200-220 students total in a given year, about 45 in the language programs. Over 90 percent are from the seven First Nations, representing a total population of over 20,000 people: Heart Lake (375 members; 184 on the reserve), Goodfish Lake (2912; 1753), Saddle Lake (9934; 6148), Kehewin (1893; 1039), Frog Lake (2454; about 1000); Beaver Lake (1054; 390) and Cold Lake (2858; 1382). The first six communities are Cree and the last is primarily Dene. Some students are fluent in their First Nations language, while others just beginning to learn it. Most are non-traditional age and first-generation university students.

Various motivations draw the students, for instance: starting an immersion program in their community, the desire to learn one's ancestral language because the parents were stripped of it in the residential school system, or the birth of a child or grandchild to whom the student wants to speak the language. Still other students speak of their desire to hear an Elder's knowledge in the original language, and to be able to

[3] Blue Quills University's Mission Statement: http://www.bluequills.ca/mission-2/ (Date accessed: August 1, 2018).

pray and speak to the Creator and their ancestors. Some students are survivors of residential schools, including Blue Quills itself, while others recount family histories bound to the school.

Plains Cree overall has about 30,000 speakers and is classified as a "developing" language or classification 5 ("vigorous use") in terms of vitality (Simons & Fennig 2017); according to the Ethnologue, it is "vigorous in many communities, particularly in the north. [Speakers of] all ages." But this is not true in any of the owner communities of Blue Quills, where nearly all fluent Plains Cree speakers are middle-aged or elderly. The 2011 census (StatsCan 2011) lists 83,475 speakers of "Cree languages", of whom nearly 48,000 are in Alberta and Saskatchewan; most of them are presumably Plains Cree speakers. It lists nearly 12,000 speakers of "Dene", presumably many of them Denesųłiné speakers. But the terminology is ambiguous—"Dene" is listed as an option in addition to specific Dene languages like Dene Dhá/Sahtú (Slavey languages), Tłı̨chǫ, etc. The ambiguous meaning of "Dene" and the fact that some Denesųłiné speakers chose "Chipewyan" and "Denesųłiné" makes the exact number harder to ascertain, and the actual number of Denesųłiné speakers may be a bit lower. Denesųłiné is listed as "threatened" (level 6b) by Ethnologue (Simons & Fennig 2017). It is acquired as L1 in two Denesųłiné communities out of about 21.

3. THE CREE AND DENE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS. As noted above, in terms of language programs UnBQ offers a Bachelor of Arts in Cree, a Bachelor of Arts in Dene and a Master of Arts in Indigenous Language (focused on Cree culture and language). The BA in Cree is divided into fluent and non-fluent streams. Only a fluent stream exists for the Dene BA but a non-fluent stream is being developed. The MA reuqires fluency or a strong ability in Cree (with some case-by-case flexibility), and the program is being evaluated to see how it may accommodate Dene students. A variety of L2 approaches are used for the non-fluent (Cree L2) Cree BA students, while the fluent Dene and MA classes have more linguistics and language pedagogy-focused coursework in addition to advanced literacy, literature, and other courses. The more technical linguistics-oriented courses are part of a holistic program with other courses focusing on teaching, land-based skills, culture, and so forth. Cree and Dene ceremonies such as sweat lodges and dances are frequently available and almost always open to all student and staff.

3.1. LAND-BASED EDUCATION AND CEREMONY. Land-based education or the incorporation of Native technologies and activities is frequently a goal of TCUs. Participating in traditional activities is seen as key to learning; First Peoples' education often emphasized experiential and implicit learning from Elders and ceremony holders. Land-based education is also a response to colonial practices isolating First Nations peoples from the land through the residential school and reserve system, which disrupted seasonal land-use patterns. Authors on TCUs have noted the multi-layered value of land-based education, with its cultural, practical and even political dimensions: "land-based education, in resurging and sustaining Indigenous life and knowledge, acts in direct contestation to settler colonialism and its drive to eliminate Indigenous life and Indigenous claims to land" (Wildcat et al. 2014). Dene authors, too, have argued for the need for land-based education in a de-colonial framework:

> To decolonize education is to retrench and retrieve our traditions in the classrooms in our communities... A decolonized Dene school would follow our traditions and values,

> our elders would be in the classrooms, the classrooms would be equally indoor and outdoor, out on the land and in the community. Dene will always learn best on the land, and we need to bring the computers, books and classes onto the land, into the context of Denendeh and what it means to be Dene. (Villebrun 2006)

Blue Quills specifically sees land-based education not only as a form of de-colonial education, but a way of restoring pride among young First Nations people in their identities and histories. According to Blue Quills Language Programs Director Marilyn Shirt (Cree, Saddle Lake):

> There's so much that we've lost, and there's so much that we need to regain to help strengthen us as a people. So, this particular school that we're in, this building, this old residential school—that whole process took away from us our relatedness to each other, our relationships, our ability to take care of ourselves. It damaged the transmission of our language from one generation to the next, and it really affected our self-esteem. So what I see this school doing, and [land-based] projects in particular, is that they're helping move us out of that state of being. (Shirt 2018)

In a larger sense, ceremony and spirituality are a form of healing from trauma and embracing the values associated with the language.

> Ceremony creates safety and there is a need to create a safe place where people feel comfortable speaking the language... Part of the UnBQ campus is a former [residential school] and has been an obstacle for some but also a form of healing from the trauma suffered in this building. Spirituality plays a foundational role as our language is a gift from the Creator and this has not hindered us as an academic institution. (Lewis et al. 2018: 242)

UnBQ programs present language reclamation and revitalization, healing, land use, and rediscovery of ceremony and spiritual practices inextricably interconnected elements in an overall de-colonial and Indigenous process (as colonization affected all of these areas at once). This connection between land-based education and spiritual practices was also described Wildcat et al. (2014): "This is more than a fortunate by-product of engaging in land-based practices... Protocols that demonstrate respect and reciprocity, such as putting down tobacco, making offerings, ceremonies, or particular ways of harvesting or treating unused animal parts, are a part of Indigenous land-based education" (Wildcat et al. 2014). This refusal to isolate these into discrete domains is in keeping with an overall ethos of cultural reclamation in TCUs and First Nations institutions.

3.2. L2 METHODS. UnBQ has experimented with a combination of L2 methods in the Cree program (only the Cree BA currently has a non-fluent stream). Some Cree L2 classes use an adaptation of the Root Word Method developed by Mohawk language teacher Brian Maracle (see Jeremy Green & Brian Maracle 2018). This approach word uses techniques as contrasting color-coding of affixes, which enable students to associate particular meanings with parts of polysynthetic words, without having to be confronted with a morass of technical morphological terms to study their own ancestral language. Students begin by memorizing person markers (on the right and left edges of

the verb word—see Table 1). Next they are introduced to a small vocabulary of roots or stems, seen in the third column of Table 1, as well as a handful of lexical "preverbs".[4]

TABLE 1. Elements of Cree verbs in a Root Word Method approach.

inflection	"preverb"	**root/stem**	inflection
ø- 3SG	miyo- 'good'	-nakosi 'looks like.AI'	-w 3SG
ni- 1SG	mayi- 'bad'	-takwan 'sounds like.AI'	-n 1/2SG
ki- 2SG	nōhtē- 'want'	-mīcisu 'eat.AI'	-nân 1PL

Instead of learning a whole verb paradigm associated with each derivation (often found in formal linguistics grammars), students practise composing words with a small lexicon of elements from the four columns, while narrating contextualized utterances, and more preverbs and roots are gradually added as students internalize their meanings and use. "The idea is to help students recognize the parts of the word that mean 'I', 'you', 'he/she', tense markers, etc., without necessarily learning the terms. In English you can learn a bunch of words, then figure out how to put them together. But in [polysynthetic] Cree, you have to first learn how to construct the word" (Marilyn Shirt, p.c.). The polysynthetic structure has a large impact on how the language is taught. A desire for uncovering L2 methods oriented toward polysynthetic languages was sparked by dissatisfaction of Elders with levels of fluency students were reaching with previous curricula heavily based on English and French curricula emphasizing nouns (Marilyn Shirt, p.c.).

3.3 INDIGENIZING LINGUISTICS IN THE COURSES. This section primarily details the experience of the author teaching a Master's-level class, "Morphosyntax from Linguistic and Indigenous Perspectives", taught by the author, a non-Indigenous academic linguist who became a second language speaker of Dene, and who is not a Cree speaker, to an all-Cree group of students. Some of the students accepted to do follow-up interviews after the class, as did Marilyn Shirt (Cree, Saddle Lake First Nation), who is the head of the Indigenous languages department at UnBQ and who also audited most of the class, given her experience engaging with these issues in program development. University president Sherri Chisan (Cree, Saddle Lake First Nation) also accepted to offer opinions on the issues, having considered them on an institutional level. Quotes from these interviews are interspersed throughout. This section also references translations and issues from two BA-level Dene linguistics classes, "Dene Phonology and Morphosyntax" and "Intermediate Dene Syntax", taught to Dene BA students by the author in a mixture of English and Dene. In both classes, students formed translation circles and, with discussion with the author, translated linguistic terminology into their languages.

The goal of "Morphosyntax from Linguistic and Indigenous Perspectives" was two-fold: first to introduce the Cree Master's morphosyntactic concepts and to allow them to develop analytical skills that may prove useful in their future language teaching

[4] Abbreviations used: AI 'animate intransitive', PL 'plural', INAN 'inanimate', SG 'singular', 1 'first person', 2 'second person'; 3 'third person'.

or engagement work. The second goal was a bit the reverse—not bringing linguistics to the First Nations community but to bring First Nations epistemologies on language into the teaching of an introductory linguistics course, and to apply this not just to Cree but to the analysis of world languages. This was in response to a call by Miami scholar Wesley Leonard to include Indigenous frameworks for language in the academic field of linguistics in his paper "Towards a Native American Linguistics" (2018), presented at the Natives4Linguistics[5] symposia at the Linguistic Society of America he organized, which led to his founding of a special interest group by the same name. Numerous Indigenous scholars at symposia echoed this call, and this course represents the author's own efforts to implement this challenge at Blue Quills.

The directionality of the name Natives4Linguistics is significant. For Leonard, this is not about an effort to overcome obstacles to bring or tailor linguistics to a First Nations audience, but to explore the prospects of Native American and First Nations frameworks for language to influence linguistic science and how introductory linguistics classes are taught. According to Leonard (2018), "Linguistic analysis often isolates, fragments, and dissects language in ways that can be alienating to members of Native American communities for whom language is not an object that can or should be conceptualized separately from peoplehood, power, or spirituality, among other areas." The Western epistemology conceives of languages as "as structurally-defined objects" which are rather abstracted from the above areas. Leonard considers typical formal definitions of language as an abstract system as too limited to be compatible with most Indigenous views of language, in which language can be as broad as "how a community connects to each other and how they express ... themselves and their culture to each other" (Leonard 2017:29). This is not a rejection of linguistics a science, nor of language documentation efforts, or even of traditional academic work on First Nations languages, but a call to broaden the scope of research to also include First Nations/Native American concepts of language and research methodologies, and to take into account the impact and usefulness of the research for communities. Both due to a severe lack of representation of First Nations/Native American scholars themselves in linguistics, as a proportion of the population and compared with the prominence of Native American languages in the literature (Leonard 2018), there are few opportunities to include First Nations epistemologies of language in academic linguistics. Chisan expressed a similar idea in her interview: "Academia tends to force an analysis through a theoretical lens that was birthed in Europe." Leonard (2018) says that even when there is representation of individuals, there is not always the same receptivity toward Native American ideas about language, a sentiment echoed by Chisan: "There are these pockets of struggle at all of the institutions, and it's really hard for them as Indigenous scholars to be acknowledged. And that goes back to the doctrine of domination, that this [Western academic] way is better."

As Leonard's call meshes well with ongoing discussions at UnBQ over curricula, and the UnBQ mission to place Dene and Cree perspectives at the centre of learning, the author decided to present the Cree MA students with first with readings of Leonard (2017) and (2018), before introducing traditional linguistics textbooks, *Exploring Language Structure* (Payne 2006), a morphosyntax workbook (Merrifield et al. 2003), with which students analyzed syntactic and morphological data from diverse languages such as English, French, Spanish, Min Nan Chinese, Palantla Chinantec

[5] See https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/natives4linguistics-special-interest-group and https://natives4linguistics.wordpress.com.

(Mexico) and Barasano (Colombia), although many classroom examples focused on Plains Cree and occasionally Denesųłiné. Students interrogated these resources, their origin and epistemologies. In keeping with the idea of not treating the languages as data abstracted from the reality of their speakers, students were given some information about the culture and situation of each of the language communities and encouraged to explore this. This was typically followed by a translation circle. In the textbook students encountered phrase structure grammar, and toward the end of the course there was some mention and illustration of frameworks like minimalism (Chomsky 1995) and the dependency-based grammar of Meaning-Text Theory (Mel'čuk 1997; Mel'čuk & Polguère 2009). While students did not explore these in detail, drawing attention to the theoretical diversity within linguistic science creates space for students bring in their own epistemologies, First Nations epistemologies and specific Dene and Cree realities, and to consider the frameworks in that context. After all of this there were in-depth classroom discussions focused on local Cree realities, relating or comparing all of this content to what students felt were Plains Cree epistemologies.

The Cree concept of interrelatedness is *wahkohtowin* [relationship or relatedness]. This encompasses literal relatedness (kinship relations) and relatedness to the land and ceremony. Students often referenced *wahkohtowin* spontaneously and said it could inform linguistics in a variety of ways. One Cree student said that, all things being equal, linguistic examples should represent authentic knowledge—linguistic examples provide snippets of a worldview, which can be an asset to or a distraction from learning the culture. One student (Pat Shirt, Cree, Saddle Lake First Nation) mentioned that in more traditional times this interrelatedness was a physical reality: "for [our generation], we learned Cree as a way to survive. That's how we learned 'go get the water' [...] the terms for trapping, it was survival. But nowadays anyone on a reserve who's little doesn't have to learn Cree to survive." Some students expressed skepticism at the value of the traditional domains of linguistics and their heavy terminological load, especially when discussing a polysynthetic language: "In Indian Country you can find a more pessimistic view—morphology, syntax, that won't work—but I think that if we can use it for teaching the language, then it's good" (Pat Shirt). Students debated the artificiality of segmenting multimorphemic words. One (fluent, and adept at parsing and analyzing the forms) finally expressed her skepticism of the artificiality of "dissecting" a "spiritual language" (Glorya Badger, Cree, Kehewin FN) while another (less fluent) said, "Coming from a non-speaker, obviously culture is included with *nehiywawewin* [Cree]. As a learner it was important to break down the words for me. That way I knew what I was saying" (Dallas Waskahat, Cree, Frog Lake FN). Several students showed a keen interest in the etymologies of salient words such *nehiyawak* [Cree people] and morphological analysis was seen as an asset in exploring historical word formation, and the worldview that the images and associations in word etymologies suggested: "In Cree, a word is comprised of units of meaning, they don't necessarily equate to the English translation. These units of meaning and how they're put together – that would give an idea of the essence of the Cree mind" (Marilyn Shirt, Cree, Saddle Lake First Nation).

The idea of *wakohtowin* itself does not necessarily transfer to other Indigenous cultures—it is seen as a Cree-specific framework. For students, this was related to the idea of linguistic relativity, as they frequently queried on how categories in their language might be related to worldview. As Marilyn Shirt also noted:

> Cree which is different from Mohawk. For example, we have animacy and Mohawk has *he* and *she*. So that informs their language. There are things that are particular to

> that view and it's not the same for others. Those kinds of things shape how we think. If you're wanting to look at interrelatedness I think that the environment shapes it as well.

Leonard (2018) also makes this point that there is not one single Native American concept of language, but many distinct, community- or group-specific epistemologies. Students frequently contrasted the naturalness including certain information expressed by grammatical categories in Cree, with respect to discussing the same topic in English. "[*wakohtowin*] is how we are related. For example [in Cree] we have animate and inanimate. A tree is alive in a certain way but in English you have to justify talking about it in that way" (Glorya Badger, Cree, Kehewin FN).

When asked how an Indigenous framework of language could inform the study of languages generally, not just Dene or Cree or other Indigenous languages, students accepted and encouraged a framework that integrated the language data with cultural, sociolinguistic and local worldview information. For example, unlike Cree and Dene, English and French are intercontinental languages associated with mass societies differentiated by class; how the associated values have shaped the lexicon in comparison with Cree was often explored, as was the situation of many distant Indigenous peoples. "For me it's interesting... you can have a connection to a person's identity the better that [information] is" (Pat Shirt, Cree MA student). Another student noted that "it's important to use the terms people use from themselves, instead of colonial or outside terms" (Dwayne Makokis, Saddle Lake, MA student). Marilyn Shirt added, "If you don't think about it as language... One group of people is interested in another group of people and they want to know what they are about. They're not going to be like 'oh forget the people, we're just interested in the language." Overall, the discussion led to a promising feeling that a First Nations framework such as Cree *wakohtowin* could indeed cast a novel eye on language data from world languages and provide a useful contribution to linguistics.

A third theme that repeatedly emerged in the interviews was the problematic lack of relationship between linguistic research and language pedagogies and a call to make linguistics research more relevant to community stakeholders in a time of linguistic crisis. In the words of Marilyn Shirt, head of the Indigenous Languages Department who audited part of the course:

> So even in understanding the quotes from [Leonard 2018], for me—The problem with linguistics it that's it an entirely different language, and a whole other way of thinking that the common person that's wanting to learn how to speak or wanting to teach a language might not be interested in, and it might not even be necessary for them. And English and some of those languages that have been studied for a lot longer have made some transitions and probably bridging … For Indigenous languages, I don't think that there's been that bridging. (Marilyn Shirt, Cree, Saddle Lake First Nation)

Indeed the question of this still incomplete relationship between linguistics and language teachers, and community efforts, came up again and again: "There's defensiveness on the part of the linguist [saying] "The work I'm doing is useful, and anger [from community language teachers] that "The work you're doing isn't useful to me." (Marilyn Shirt). Having used and taught academic linguistic grammars because they were the most comprehensive resources available for the UnBQ languages, but finding them utterly inaccessible to students, Shirt argued for the urgency for linguists to

create strong, clear and accessible bridging between their insights and work and the language teaching or revitalization efforts happening in communities.

> It's very easy to just stay in linguistics. Because language is a puzzle, and it's a very interesting puzzle. It's like going into a cave, and getting lost and [saying] "wow." They need to keep reminding themselves, this is interesting but *how* can this be useful? That is what I would recommend if you want to decolonize your field." (Marilyn Shirt, Cree, Saddle Lake)

While Shirt recognized linguistic science and applied work as distinct, she noted that "it wouldn't be very hard to make that bridging", and that linguists are often those best placed to do it from within the field.

While there may be a wealth of user-friendly linguist-produced resources for some individual Indigenous languages, and one cannot generalize over this, there remains a general division and tension in academic language work in terms of funding, evaluations, etc. between "research" and "service"—a category in which linguists often find their pedagogical work assigned. This point was repeatedly raised in the Natives4Linguistics symposia. This is despite the fact that the interplay between documentation, revitalization, reclamation, and pedagogies itself raises interesting theoretical questions and is a fertile area of research, as seen by currents on community-based collaborative research, in which linguistic research and community applications are "interwoven and mutually supportive activities for language revitalization, documentation and linguistic description" (Silva 2018, following Penfield et al. 2008, Cope & Penfield 2011 and Rice 2018). This comes at a time of increased interest in Dene linguistics as to the pedagogical implications of formal models of language structure—see Holden (2013), Montoya (2017, 2018) and Cox (2018), for example, with similar discussions happening across the field.

This integration fits well with a TCU such Blue Quills, with its strong focus on language teaching and revitalization, and loyalty to specific communities. Linguistics education is not kept separate from the goals of teachings and language reclamation efforts. Instead, instructors and students constantly seek to understand the implications of models of language for language teaching.

4. TRANSLATING LINGUISTIC TERMINOLOGY INTO DENE AND CREE.

A corollary of making the insights of linguistics accessible to the community members and the goal of using the language in the classroom is the project of translating linguistic terms into Cree and Dene. Some example terms are shown in Table 2. In the linguistics classes, students translated these terms as they came up, often resulting in interesting debates. For example, students initially gave 'word root' the two translations in (1):

(1)	a.	kicitowin	b.	itwewina	ocepí
		kici–itwewin		itwewin–a	ocepí
		great–word		word–PL.INAN	root
		'word root', lit. "main/big word"		'word root', lit. "words' root"	

Cree has multiple words for 'root', depending on the plant. Students ultimately preferred the semantic extension of *ocepí* 'plant/tree root' in (1b) over (1a), but this was debated as other specific words for 'root', such as *watapí* 'root of white pine', exist.

TABLE 2. Denesųłiné and Plains Cree Linguistics Terms Translated by UnBQ Students

	Plains Cree	*Denesųłiné*	*literal translations*
'root'	itwewina ocepí	yati chįghaiyé	'word's root' (from 'tree root')
'prefix'	eyahkisitai	benatthé heltł'ǫ	'it is tied before' (Dene) related to 'making larger' (Cree)
'morpheme'	itwewintsa	yatitsí	'small words' (Cree) 'word bits' (Dene)
'morphology'	tanisi e-ici-papasin-amihk	t'ąt'u yatitsí ełá nílye	'how you twist out speech' (Cree) 'how morphemes are put together' (Dene)

The discussion brought out the whole question of neologisms for a First Nations language and a debate about the artificiality of such terms, especially when new. "The main idea is that [nehiyawēwin/Cree] was given to us [by the Creator] and it was given to us *in this form.* But today we have to make up these words to describe the modern reality—"justice", even "prefix", "syntax", "morphology". If not we can't be very precise about what we're speaking about [so] the terminology serves a purpose" (Pat Shirt, Cree, Saddle Lake First Nation).

In the Dene linguistics classes, students (all fluent or nearly fluent Dene speakers from Cold Lake) translated phonetics concepts such as places of articulation, found in Figure 1 below (the terms *tongue blade* and *uvula* remain untranslated at the time of writing, and the Dene linguistics lexicon is still evolving).

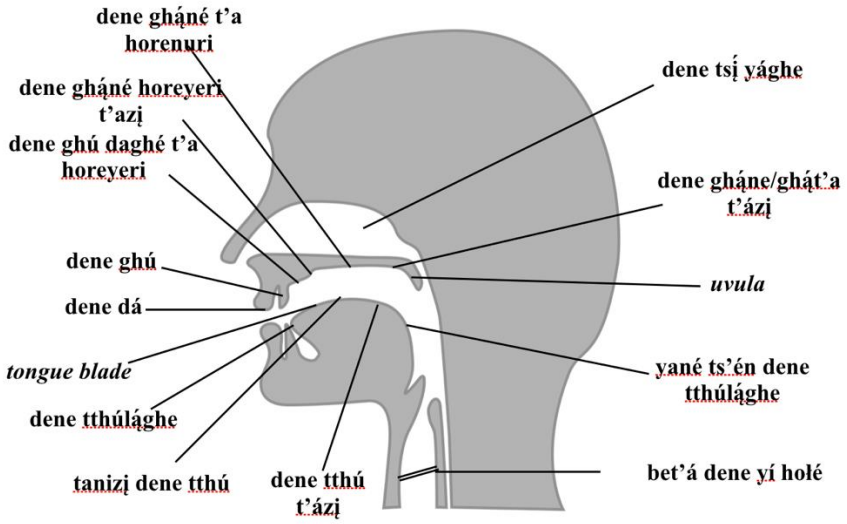

FIGURE 1. Places of articulation in Denesųłiné, translated by UnBQ students.

The students initially struggled to name some of these highly specific anatomical features. However, a Dene instructor was brought in who was also an experienced hunter familiar with butchering moose, and he related that Dene hunters do have names for parts of the vocal tract. This not only provided valuable suggestions for terms, but ended up being culturally enriching. All of the students were women, and women do not usually hunt and butcher large game animals in traditional Dene culture, so the students were unfamiliar with these terms known to hunters. Also notable was the translation of many linguistic terms such as "syntax" and "morphology" with relative clauses. For instance, while "morpheme" in Table 2 is rendered as *yatitsí* "word bits" (or "morphology") as *yatitsí t'ąt'u elá nílye* "how morphemes are put together". Dene tends to use verbs to refer to abstract concepts, reserving nouns for concrete objects (usually), so the students used relative clauses rather than nouns. These terms resemble descriptions, and have the advantage of explaining the concept, unlike the more opaque Latin-based nouns used in English. Interestingly, the metaphors used to describe morphological structure in the two languages were markedly different (see Table 2).

In both Cree and Dene classes, this was a first attempt at translating this range of concepts. The Dene and Cree linguistics lexicons were continually updated and new versions handed out each week as they evolved. Students understood this as their own creation for these courses, but it was also clear from the beginning that the lexicons were resources they were creating for future UnBQ teachers and language instructors elsewhere, in part to enable a teacher to have the terms to teach about language monolingually in the future. To this end, students agreed to their use by others. However, other Cree and Dene people may translate these concepts differently—neologisms often take a long time to become established.

This co-creation of vocabulary also creates a sense of ownership among the students of the study of linguistics and over the resulting lexicon. This inventory of terms also provides material for future lectures on linguistics in the Dene language—one of the existing barriers to giving the classes mostly or entirely in Dene is the inability to be understood when speaking about specific aspects of grammar and sounds, due to a lack of established Dene terms to describe linguistic concepts. The resulting lexicon therefore furthers the cultivation of a Dene-speaking space for current and future students.

5. CHALLENGES FACING THE BLUE QUILLS LANGUAGE PROGRAMS.

Of the myriad challenges facing Indigenous institutions in Alberta and Canada, and in TCUs in North America generally, economic barriers remain a primary obstacle to success. In Canada, provinces are responsible for universities, but the federal government is responsible for First Nations, what responsibility will the government of Canada have for First Nations universities? The Alberta Ministry of Advanced Education refers to Indigenous institutions as a category ("First Nations colleges") distinct from "public post-secondary institutions," thus implying that the former are "private" or not public.[6] The Canadian government leaves Indigenous universities in a sort of limbo of inadequate funding because they do not fall under the provincial mandates, nor does the federal government (responsible for First Nations secondary schools, clinics, etc.) provide stable core funding for Indigenous-controlled *post-secondary* institutions. However for Phillips (2011:232) the Crown indeed has this responsibility: "Education in Canada is

[6] See http://advancededucation.alberta.ca/post-secondary/institutions/fnmi/ (Date accessed: August 1, 2018).

not only a provincial responsibility […] The federal government's constitutional responsibility in education is rooted in the Constitution Act 1982, the Indian Act, and treaties between the Crown (i.e., The Federal Government of Canada) and the First Nations of Canada."

UnBQ President Sherri Chisan, in the interview for this article, makes the argument that post-secondary education should in fact be covered by Treaty in Canada, based on historical and cultural factors of First Nations and the signing of the Treaties.

> My understanding is [that] among our people education has always been considered a lifelong practice. So when our people entered into treaty, there are a couple of factors I believe that support the case for post-secondary education being covered by treaty. One of those is our clear understanding that education is lifelong, and we always need to have the opportunity to learn. The second one is that during the treaty signing ceremony, one of the leaders pointed to the scribe that was hired by the government, and apparently this person had a law degree (or whatever a law degree looked like in those days) and he said, 'We need our people to have an opportunity to have the same kind of education that he got.' Which is clearly not just high school, and it's not just law. It's to that level of professional education. So we maintain that that also supports post-secondary education being covered by treaty. We also maintain that treaty was entered into as sovereign nations, and that the sovereignty was not surrendered in treaty.

Today UnBQ and other Indigenous institutions receive a small fraction of the funding per-student of provincially funded universities, which in Chisan's view reveals an enduring colonial dynamic:

> The land was not surrendered in treaty. The treaties were an agreement to share this land peacefully and respectfully. And to share the bounty of the land, the resources of the land. And so now when I talk about post-secondary and the resources, I say to governments: I can see how the resources of these lands have benefitted your people. [...] But then I go back to Blue Quills, into a former Indian residential school where my office is, and I see what the resources have built for our people, and the discrepancy in how much benefit the parties to Treaty have received. So there is still work to do.

This argument is for the logic and appropriateness of considering the education mandate in Treaty in the 21st century as extending to higher education. On a practical level, it is hard to see Indigenous universities and TCUs survive under a private model (which is difficult enough for established and wealthier non-Indigenous colleges in the USA). An impoverished student base and lack of revenue and employment on the reserves generally makes a private model or reliance on local tax base unsustainable for TCUs in Canada. In contrast with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) call to action, which calls for more funding for preserving and revitalizing First Nations languages, many First Nations post-secondary institutions such as UnBQ have actually seen their government funding decline since the TRC calls to action (Marilyn Shirt, p.c.). Still, many community members remain optimistic that these promises will be honoured. In the meantime, with an unstable, proposal-based funding model, language programs are understaffed and the prospect of layoffs or discontinuation of needed language programs has periodically loomed over Blue Quills's 40-year history, though it has so far been avoided.

6. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS. UnBQ is working to boost its role in teaching First Nations languages and developing L2 approaches oriented toward their

specific structural and sociolinguistic features. UnBQ is developing a Bachelor of Education focusing on training in teaching endangered polysynthetic languages in a culturally authentic way—a program highly compatible but distinct from the current BA programs in Dene and Cree. A non-fluent or mixed stream for the BA in Dene is also being developed, as is a current pedagogical grammar for both languages— initiatives that have recently received funding from the Aboriginal Language Initiative—Aboriginal People's Program of the Canadian federal government. These events, coupled with the current increase in interest in First Nations experiences and priorities nationally, are reasons to be optimistic about a shift in the relationship between the Canadian government and Indigenous institutions and the survival and development of the latter.

Many questions remain unresolved—for instance, how exactly should Cree and Dene languages be taught as second languages? Through implicit land-based teaching, root word-like methods, or some other method or blend yet to be devised? What exactly are First Nations epistemologies of language, locally and more broadly? Most of the UnBQ Cree and Dene students approach the linguistics material not out of abstract curiosity toward structure and typological variation (though some have these interests as well). Most have responsibilities as parents and grandparents. While there is indeed curiosity about the languages of the world, this is balanced by a deep sense of responsibility and commitment to the survival of their own languages. This, together with an overall epistemology of interrelatedness between language, peoplehood, culture and spirituality, constitutes a powerful and promising counterpoint to the abstract-typological framework the textbook is geared toward. What would introductory linguistics teaching look like if it were aimed equally at the needs of both audiences?

Despite recent shifts and individual linguists adopting a deeply collaborative approach, an overall mismatch appears to persist between linguistics as a field and the approach and priorities of various Canadian First Nations with regard to language. In general, First Nations communities mentioned here see a more expansive and relationship-based vision of a linguist's role, one in which the blend of language work slants a bit more toward user-friendly pedagogical materials than is the norm in many projects. Despite the increase in discussions in the International Year and International Decade of Indigenous Languages, the advent of the Natives4Linguistics special interest group at the Linguistic Society of America, and a general recent shift in academic linguistic culture toward an increasing investment in collaborative community-based approaches, this is still not a mainstream position in linguistics. The interviews with UnBQ staff and students suggest ways in which First Nations' needs can further inform training of linguists in community-engaged language work.

Finally, what role can First Nations and Native American universities, with their unique position and mission, play in this conversation? In the TCU corner of academia, the linguist-community relationship is closely led by community needs, and research proceeds with an eye to pedagogy and revitalization applications. With the needed terminology, some linguistics teaching can even be *in* the languages, not just about them. But these institutions have not generally been given the opportunity to thrive, given the political and economic realities. These questions will be worked out in a time in which language loss is a critical threat to the UnBQ member nations, and their needs for language education, revitalization and quality post-secondary education pressing, with time and funding scarce and unpredictable. One hopes for a future in which First Nations institutions can play a greater role in these academic conversations and have the resources to fully address the needs of their students while developing the quality linguistics and language teaching programs that they are so well placed to implement.

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Josh Holden
holdejo17@gmail.com